Contemporary British Dramatists, Volume X:

KRISHNA KUMARI

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KRISHNA KUMARI

AN HISTORICAL DRAMA IN FOUR ACTS

BY EDWARD THOMPSON







LONDON
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TO REGINALD SCHOMBERG

NOTE ON THE PRONUNCIATION OF INDIAN NAMES

a As this sound approximates to the English *u*, it is sometimes so transliterated, i.e. *Umbaji* for *Ambaji*.

ā, like *a* in *father*.

i, like English *ee*, but shorter; except when two or more following consonants make it like *i* in *sin*—example, *Singh*.

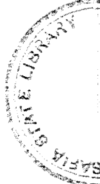
u, like English *oo*.

CHARACTERS IN THE ORDER OF THEIR APPEARANCE

DAULAT RĀO SINDHIĀ	*Mahrāttā Chieftain.*
AMBĀJI INGLIĀ	*His Minister.*
MĀN SINGH	*Mahārājā of Jodhpur.*
AJIT SINGH	*A Mewār Noble, in the Service of Mān Singh.*
GRAEME MERCER	*Ambassador of the East India Company at Sindhia's Camp.*
LIEUTENANT JAMES TOD	*Attaché with Mercer.*
BHIM SINGH	*Mahārānā of Mewār.*
SARUP SINGH	*His Minister.*
SANGRAM SINGH	*A Mewār Noble.*
KRISHNĀ KUMĀRI	*Princess of Mewār.*
LAKSHMI	*Daughter of Sarup Singh.*
THE RĀNI OF MEWĀR	
JAUWAN DĀS	*The Mahārānā of Mewār's Brother.*

MESSENGER, SERVANTS, RĀJPUTS, MAHRĀTTAS.

ACT I



ACT I

The Time is late afternoon of a June day in 1806—dry, scorching, windless,—the Rains are late in breaking.

The East India Company are entering on the period which is to see the steady consolidation of their rule, after its early perils and triumphs. They have flung a chain of influence round the coast of India, from Bombay to Calcutta, with only inconsiderable gaps. During the last decade they have destroyed Tippu Sultan of Mysore, their one formidable enemy in South India; they have extended their protection over Shah Alam, the old, blind Mogul Emperor at Delhi, and they have signally defeated the great Mahratta chieftains Sindhia and Holkar. But a mood of caution has supervened; Sir George Barlow, the new Governor-General, has sent ambassadors to the camps of Sindhia and Holkar, and has assured them of a free hand in Rajasthan, so long as they do not trouble territory under British protection or rule. Rajasthan, in consequence, is being mercilessly ravaged by the Mahrattas, as during many years past; and the Rajput chieftains of Mewar, Jaipur, and Jodhpur are being encouraged by Sindhia to destroy one another.

The Scene is the courtyard of Siva's shrine at Eklinga—a terrace cut out of the steep side of a lonely ravine six miles north of Udaipur, the capital of Mewar. The courtyard is roughly paved, and enclosed by stone walls. The wall at the left is low, giving a view down the dark, twisted valley to its narrow opening, which shows a sun-scorched plain beyond. The right wall is high and featureless. Over the back wall, which is also high, the opposite side of the valley looms almost sheer, its scarped

summit black with overhanging masses of honeycomb, The only entrance to the courtyard is a wide gate in the centre of the back wall. It stands open during the action, showing, not the road, which is lower than the level of the terrace and is reached by steps, but the steep hillside of primitive rock dropping to the valley bottom where clusters of bel *and bamboo and thickets of oleander indicate the presence of springs and streams that have outlasted the dry season.*

The shrine proper, a marble temple in the form of a pagoda with terraced pyramidal roof, stands diagonally across the back right-hand corner of the stage. It is approached by a flight of steps, at the head of which, on a solid pedestal, a large brazen bull faces the darkness of the inner shrine.

The courtyard is bare, except for a giant pipal-*tree which grows close to the parapet and toward the front of the stage. In its shadow rugs have been spread and a scarlet canopy has been stretched, supported by spears, at whose heads pennons are fluttering. A velvet* gadi *or royal cushion rests on a rich carpet, and is surrounded by other cushions so as to form three sides of a small hollow square. The stage is set for the Maharaja Daulat Rao Sindhia's private conference with the Maharana of Mewar.*

At the top of the steps leading up to the shrine two Gosains are standing—priests of Siva. The God's crescent is smeared on their foreheads, and their hair is braided into a tiara encircling their heads and entwined with a rosary of the reddish-brown rudraksha *berries sacred to Siva. They are wearing saffron robes, and their faces and the exposed parts of their bodies are*

dusky with ashes. They stand aside haughtily as SINDHIA *and his suite emerge from the temple, where they have left garlands of marigolds and white* bel-*flowers for the* lingam *and brazen bull.*

SINDHIA *is a young man of about five-and-twenty, already obese ; his life has been one of plunder and intrigue, and his eyes are sharp and suspicious. With him is his minister,* AMBAJI INGLIA, *an old rascal of eighty, with long, snowy beard ; his face is shrewd and good-humoured. Both the Mahrattas are wearing golden turbans and robes of brocaded silk, and threefold necklaces of bright stones. With them are* MAHARAJA MAN SINGH *of Jodhpur and* AJIT SINGH *of Mewar, now deep in* MAN SINGH'S *confidence and busy in his service.* MAN SINGH'S *manner is dignified, and his features express intelligence and self-satisfaction, yet are chequered from time to time with darker gleams. Let* TOD, *who knew him well, describe the sudden appearance of these blacker moods : "though the* ensemble *of his countenance almost denotes benevolence, yet there is ever and anon a doubtful expression, which, with a peculiarly formed forehead, gives a momentary cast of malignity to it." Ajit Singh—"the pliant and subtle Ajit" (Tod)—is tall and slender, with piercing, brilliant eyes. The defiant, graceful bearing of the Rajputs contrasts strongly with the furtive vulgarity of the Mahrattas.* SINDHIA *and* MAN SINGH *are attended by suites, festively attired.*

SINDHIA *descends the steps followed by* MAN SINGH, AMBAJI, AJIT SINGH, *and the suites. Before entering the canopied space, they look down the valley.*

MAN SINGH: The Ambassador is late.

SINDHIA: I have arranged that he should be. We have our own affairs to settle first. The elephant has only just arrived at his tent.

[*There is a general laugh.*

[SINDHIA *and* MAN SINGH *dismiss their suites, and enter the canopied space with* AMBAJI *and* AJIT SINGH. *They all seat themselves.*

AJIT SINGH (*looking at* MAN SINGH): Maharaja Man Singh has one fear. Will not the presence of the Englishmen interfere with our settling with Rana Bhim Singh?

MAN SINGH: Why should the ambassador be here at all?

AMBAJI (*to* AJIT SINGH): Have you not explained that Rana Bhim Singh will think the English are with us, and will not dare to refuse anything we ask?

MAN SINGH: The business will call for plain speaking. Why should the English power find a place at our council?

AMBAJI: Not the English power; only the ghost of that power. These are not the days of Hastin Saheb or Ouellesley Saheb,(1) but of Barlow.(2) The English want nothing but peace—peace that they may sell their goods and send home shiploads of rupees. His Excellency has brought a treaty of perpetual friendship.

SINDHIA: "Tell the Maharaja Sindhia," said one at their council, "that it is no concern of ours what he does in Rajasthan. Let him but keep his side of the wall and we will keep ours."

MAN SINGH (*leaning back comfortably*): That is well. Then all is settled.

AMBAJI: All. Congratulations, son-in-law of the Chief of the Sisodias!(3)

[MAN SINGH *salaams complacently in acknowledgment of the greeting.*

There is but one small matter. The Maharaja Sindhia has been put to great expense in supporting your claim to Rana Bhim Singh's daughter. He asks that this expense be made good, as was promised.

MAN SINGH (*uneasily*): It shall be. After I have become the Chief of the Sisodias' son-in-law, if a *lakh*(4) of rupees will suffice——

AMBAJI (*throwing back his head and laughing heartily as he strokes his long, white beard*): Raja Man Singh is pleased to jest. He sets a small value on the Flower or Rajasthan.

SINDHIA: The girl is in my power. Shall I offer her in the open market and see what prince will bid most?

MAN SINGH (*sullenly*): How much do you ask?

AMBAJI: If the Maharaja Sindhia overlooks certain matters that might justly be chargeable, then—being your friend—he says he will take twelve *lakhs*.

MAN SINGH: Twelve *lakhs!* How am I to raise such a sum?

AMBAJI (*laughing again*): You know the methods as well as anyone. The Maharaja Sindhia will lend your tax-collectors a brigade of artillery, which includes a battery of mountain-guns.

MAN SINGH: My territory has been peeled white.

AMBAJI: There is Mewar.

MAN SINGH: Mewar is in worse case still. Was it twenty *lakhs* you wrung from it? Some say more.(5) It has been feeding three wolf-packs for many years—Amir Khan's,(6) Holkar's,(7) and Sindhia's.

AMBAJI: Udaipur has not been looted yet—the only place in Mewar of which this can be said. It will be your new father-in-law who will pay—gladly, to save his capital.

SINDHIA: I would have given the girl to Jagat Singh if he had been willing to pay. He refused; you bought us. Jagat Singh refused, and thought that he would possess her in spite of me. But, though Rana Bhim Singh accepted him and sent the Udaipur troops to his aid, you saw him flung back at the battle of the pass. He is skulking now in Udaipur.

AMBAJI (*in quiet tones, half persuasion, half menace*): We are waiting for Rana Bhim Singh. Is he to receive the Maharaja Sindhia's orders that he dismiss Jagat Singh?

SINDHIA (*savagely*): These accursed English have taken all the meat and left me the hide. They have tossed me these deserts of Rajasthan, where you can hardly feed a rat. I tell you, if I do not get the money, my troops will take their pay where they can. There is your territory, and there is Udaipur.

AJIT SINGH (*his face slightly flushed with shame and resentment*): The Maharaja Sindhia overestimates the wealth of Udaipur.

AMBAJI: Very possibly. I daresay there is as much cash and jewellery buried in old cowsheds, if we knew where to look for it.

SINDHIA (*with conviction*): No, it is in Udaipur. Mother Durga, why did I never know before that there was such a place? Its palaces and islands are like a piece of heaven. That is where you Rajputs have carried your gold.

AMBAJI: Let us all speak frankly, as friends should. Ajit Singh, why is Rana Bhim Singh coming here?

AJIT SINGH: That he may be persuaded to honour his word as to his daughter.

SINDHIA: Then she will go to Jagat Singh.

MAN SINGH: She was betrothed to my kingdom.

AMBAJI: Keep that for the English ambassador presently. Here we can stick to facts. There was no betrothal—simply a proposal by your predecessor, which came to nothing by his death.

SINDHIA: It was nothing but talk.

AMBAJI: But the Rana has passed his solemn word to Jagat Singh. Why should the Maharaja Sindhia pluck your rose for you? What if he should choose to become the Rana's son-in-law himself?

AJIT SINGH: I am from Mewar and can answer that question. All Udaipur would be one flaming anger. How could he push past such a wall of desperation? He will as soon become the son-in-law of Siva.

SINDHIA (*starting from his seat in his passion*): You Rajputs are all alike—beggars who in your insolence think the sun himself an upstart! I could crush you and your Rana—could crush your old and your new masters together—as easily as I have crushed Rana Bhim Singh and Jagat Singh. You think I dare not keep the prize I

have taken! I am the master of Hindusthan—you are my slaves while I choose to employ you.

AMBAJI (*checking both* SINDHIA *and* MAN SINGH *with his hand*): Will the Maharajas let an old man speak for them, and not quarrel when the Englishmen will be here at any moment and find us with our business unfinished? We know it would be difficult. They would kill their women first, and then the men would rush out and give a lot of trouble being killed themselves. *We* should lose, too, of course; but soldiers are cheap, if you can raise the money to pay them.

AJIT SINGH: Yes, you might take Udaipur, when it had become ashes. But the Princess Krishna would have perished.

AMBAJI (*smiling to* SINDHIA): Of course. It would be better to use stratagem. Persuade the Rana to bring his daughter here, to be wedded to Raja Man Singh in our camp. Raja Man Singh might then feign a fever, while another stepped forward and became the bridegroom.

[*Seeing* MAN SINGH's *anger and alarm, he laughs.*

No, I am only jesting. Of course, the Maharaja Sindhia has no intention of playing you false. All he wants is his just dues. Why should he pay for the fruit that another is to enjoy? Come, he is generous; say ten *lakhs*.

[*A blowing of trumpets outside, and the heavy tread of an elephant is heard.*

SINDHIA: We lose time; the ambassador is here. I will give the girl to Jagat Singh.

MAN SINGH: Ambaji, you are a most utter villain.

AMBAJI (*laughing, as he turns to* SINDHIA): He has consented.

SINDHIA: It is well. Let us now receive his Excellency with due honour, as the representative of the mightiest race of shopkeepers the world has ever seen.

[*Two Englishmen come up the steps from the road.* MR. GRAEME MERCER, *the Ambassador, is about thirty-five; his face is bloodless and tired-looking. He wears a tall "stove-pipe" hat and is in civilian dress, blue with bright gold facings and velvety blue waistcoat.* LIEUTENANT JAMES TOD, *his attaché, is a dozen years younger. His red complexion is heightened by the day's indescribable sultriness and his stiff stock. He is in military dress, with cocked hat. Both Englishmen keep their hats on during the interview which follows. All rise on their entrance, and* SINDHIA *greets them effusively.*

Be seated, Mercer Saheb. Be seated, Tod Saheb. I cannot find words to express my sense of the very great honour you have done our conference by giving up your time to attend it. It makes the marriage of my friend Maharaja Man Singh doubly auspicious. You know, we Hindus believe that in the old days the gods often came to such meetings as this. You English are the gods of India to-day.

MERCER (*as he and* TOD *take their seats on the cushions provided for them*): Mr. Tod and I are very grateful to you, Maharaja. We feel it a great privilege to be here. I hope we have not kept you waiting long. The elephant that you kindly sent arrived very late. May I say one thing now, before the Rana arrives?

SINDHIA (*affably*): Are we not all brothers here?

MERCER (*in a gravely suave manner, cultivated by reading and drafting innumerable minutes and official*

letters, whose aim has been to say as little as possible as impressively as possible): I feel I ought to make it perfectly clear that my Government view with alarm anything that tends to weaken the authority of the ruling princes of India.

SINDHIA (*politely insolent*): Of course. Their record places that beyond all doubt.

AMBAJI (*leaning forward. His manner is benevolent but puzzled*): But what question is there of weakening the Rana of Mewar's power? On the contrary, we have met to consider how we may help this unfortunate ruler. Raja Man Singh here is willing to marry his daughter.

MERCER (*apparently unruffled by* SINDHIA'S *sneer*): We have everywhere encountered evidence of the quite exceptional regard in which the Rana of Mewar is held. Is not his family the most ancient of all?

SINDHIA: So we are to see the Indian kingdoms reshuffled in the order of their age? One would expect the English to be the leaders in such a rearrangement!

MERCER (*stiffly*): Maharaja, I have no instructions to argue the ethics of the Indian situation with you. We have to deal with things as they are. I thought you would have been interested to know of the Governor-General's distress at the misfortunes that have overtaken this noble family of which we hear so much.

SINDHIA (*suave again*): Of course. That is a great trouble to all of us. We all want one thing only, and that is to see them prosperous again.

TOD (*who can control his restlessness no longer*): Then why is Mewar being wasted by war?

SINDHIA: It is true that Mewar is being wasted by war; but it is not *my* war. Let me explain. The Rana's daughter was betrothed to Raja Man Singh's predecessor, but he died before the wedding could take place.

[*Very piously.*

Now to us Hindus a betrothal is something more sacred than words can express.

MERCER: Quite so. But the proposed bridegroom died, so the betrothal came to nothing.

AMBAJI (*leaning forward benevolently*): In this case the betrothal was to the kingdom, so it was no ordinary arrangement. The whole policy and honour of the State of Jodhpur hinged upon it. Is not that so, Maharaja Man Singh?

MAN SINGH: It was a matter of the deepest honour to me.

AMBAJI (*continuing in his most persuasive manner*): When the late raja died, the betrothal naturally stood with his successor, the present raja.

MERCER (*correctly polite*): Is that really your custom?

AMBAJI: Is it possible that a gentleman who is so versed in our customs does not know that? Excuse me, Mercer Saheb, but I am an old man, and I remember all the English gentlemen that have come to us, for one reason and another, during very many years; not one of them has understood us as you do.

[MERCER *is obviously pleased.*

Tod Saheb, too, though he has been in the country only a short time, has won all our hearts by the way he wishes to know everything about us. (*Looking gravely at* SINDHIA.) It is a great mark of friendship that the English Government should have sent such gentlemen here.

Certainly, it is our custom; the betrothal is to the kingdom, not to the person of the ruler. All these marriages are affairs of state, arranged by the ruler after consultation with his ministers.

TOD: How is it that the Rana of Mewar did not understand this? Has no one ever told him of his own customs?

SINDHIA (*rather helplessly*): Why . . . he understood, of course. How could he help but understand?

AMBAJI (*coming to his rescue*): You see, his chief minister, Sarup Singh, was bribed by the Maharaja of Jaipur.

MERCER: Bribed? Are you sure?

AMBAJI (*an old man obviously hurt that his word should be questioned*): This Sarup Singh, your Excellency, is not a true Rajput. He has wandered into all sorts of places, and has lost all his religion. (*Shaking his head sadly, and stroking his white beard.*) He is a very bad man. He served in the Mahratta armies for five years, so we know what we are saying. He is a man without any principle *whatever.*

[*The company look very sad, and shake their heads.*

Why, Ajit Singh here was Rana Bhim Singh's trusted friend till Sarup Singh's jealousy made him leave Mewar and take service with Raja Man Singh. It was all because they belonged to different clans.(8) You do not know these Rajputs of Mewar, and how they have quarrelled. Ajit Singh was too honest to work with Sarup Singh.

MERCER (*to* SINDHIA): Well, go on, Maharaja.

SINDHIA: The Maharaja of Jaipur bribed Sarup Singh, and made proposals for Rana Bhim Singh's daughter.

TOD (*with particular truculence*): So the Maharaja of Jaipur also did not know his own customs!

AMBAJI (*looking at* TOD *with considerable admiration, and deciding that he deserves as big a lie as possible*): You must understand, this was *all* Sarup Singh's doing. It was really French intrigue. After we had sent all those French rascals packing, as our treaty with the English Government required(9) (SINDHIA *looks virtuous*), they had to go to other rulers, and they got hold of Sarup Singh. So he tried to arrange an alliance between Mewar and Jaipur. Sarup Singh promised to employ the French officers and raise a big army from the two States. The State of Jaipur is very rich and powerful.

SINDHIA (*who feels they had better get back to the original narrative*): The Maharaja of Jaipur asked for the Rana's daughter, and sent a great marriage embassy and superb gifts.

MERCER: So I have heard. And Maharaja Man Singh intercepted them.

AMBAJI: You see, it was a matter which deeply affected his honour. He was very greatly disgraced when the Rana accepted the Maharaja of Jaipur.

MERCER: That is what I want to know. Then he did accept the Maharaja of Jaipur?

AMBAJI: How could he help it? Mewar is powerless. She has had war after war.

SINDHIA (*who is under the impression that it is only necessary to mention the word* bribe *to persuade the Englishmen of anything*): The Maharaja of Jaipur threatened to bribe Amir Khan to bring his Mussulmans and utterly sack Udaipur.

AMBAJI (*growing reminiscent, with his eyes closed dreamily*): I am an old man, and I have seen Mewar

growing continually weaker. There was war when the present Rana succeeded; another claimed the throne, and half his sirdars(10) were against Bhim Singh. Then, when Sarup Singh won the Rana's confidence, all the best went. (*Sententiously*) Mewar's greatest need to-day is peace.

SINDHIA: I have invited Maharana Bhim Singh here to discuss the whole question. It was because I knew my English friends' minds had been poisoned against me that I wished them to be present. Then they will understand how much I have done to befriend this unfortunate family.

MERCER (*non-committal but soothing*): It has been very good of you to give us this explanation, Maharaja. I am sure that my Government will appreciate it, when I report on the whole matter to them.

[*There is a flourish of trumpets, and shouts of* "Raj-Raj-Iswara"—"*The King of Kings!*"—*as a cavalcade clatters up the road. Leaving his escort outside,* RANA BHIM SINGH *mounts the steps up to the courtyard, accompanied by* SARUP SINGH. *Both are tall men, with black beards brushed fiercely back over their faces. They wear light mail—corselets and steel skull-caps—and elaborate, full-skirted robes, brightly girdled. They carry lances, long, curving swords, and a whole armoury of lesser weapons.* RANA BHIM SINGH *is thirty-six years old; a man of easy, commanding majesty, his face handsome, intelligent, attractive, indolent, weak.* SARUP SINGH, *who is seven or eight years older, is a man of restless, troubled eyes and fiery, impatient manner; across his face is a sword-*

scar, a mark from the battlefield of Akola, where he saved his Rana, fighting for his life against rebel nobles.

[*All rise to greet* RANA BHIM SINGH *as he enters the canopied space.*

SINDHIA: Long life to Maharana Bhim Singh, the Lion of Mewar!

BHIM SINGH: Long life to Maharaja Daulat Rao Sindhia!

[*Greetings are exchanged all round among the Indians, being reduced to a minimum of hostile formality between* SARUP SINGH *and* AJIT SINGH. *The* ENGLISHMEN *stand awkwardly expectant.*

SINDHIA: Gentlemen, we are honoured by the presence of my English friends.

[MERCER *and* TOD *acknowledge the introduction, the former with a bow, the latter with a salute, and* RANA BHIM SINGH *and* SARUP SINGH *reply with salaams. All seat themselves.*

They are deeply interested in the settlement of Mewar, so unhappily distracted by these wars. (*Beaming benevolently.*) They have consented to help us with their counsel. Rana, I fear you have made a hot and troublesome journey.

BHIM SINGH (*with a profound bow towards the temple*): I am the Great God's servant. It is no trouble to visit his shrine.

SINDHIA: My English friends are lost in admiration of this holy place; and what they can see from the hill's summit entrances them still more. In this evening light your beautiful city looks like a piece of Indra's heaven brought down to earth.

MERCER: I consider it very fortunate that it has escaped in the tumults of these unhappy times.

SINDHIA: May the gods preserve it always! There is no city more dear to every patriotic Hindu. It is not your capital only, Rana, it is the holy city of every one of us. It surely will be strange if we cannot compose our differences here, in the shadow of the Great God's shrine. We have met, with out hearts filled with friendly thoughts. We are all brothers here, and we must be careful not to dishonour this sacred place by any bitter feelings or words. Rana Bhim Singh, we are all troubled about the condition of Mewar. Mewar's greatest need is peace.

[AMBAJI *and* MAN SINGH *nod gravely.*

BHIM SINGH: The Great God knows that that is true.

SINDHIA (*persuasively*): Then come, how can we restore peace to Mewar? Let us see if we cannot find a way.

SARUP SINGH: Very easily. Let your army and those of your infernal allies go. Then our land can recover. This is not Maharastra, but Mewar. That city yonder (*pointing in the direction of Udaipur*) is not Poona, but Udaipur. What are Mahrattas doing at Eklinga?

SINDHIA (*disconcerted*): As you say, this is not Maharastra. We came here to protect the Rana from Jagat Singh's designs.

BHIM SINGH (*with dignity*): He had no designs but such as I had sanctioned. He came to be betrothed to my daughter.

SARUP SINGH: You have protected us as the wolf protects the deer. Our land has only her bones left.

SINDHIA: I have offered you lasting peace, and my protection. Dismiss Jagat Singh.

BHIM SINGH: My honour demands that I stay by my word.

SINDHIA: Yes; your word to Raja Man Singh.

BHIM SINGH: It was never pledged to him.

SINDHIA: To his predecessor.

BHIM SINGH: Not to him. All this you know well. (*To* RAJA MAN SINGH) Dare you maintain that my daughter was promised to you?

MAN SINGH (*uneasily*): She was promised to my kingdom?

BHIM SINGH: They dishonour my child and me, when they spread this story, that she was betrothed to another. Even if she were, she is not a piece of land, that she should pass from ruler to ruler. She shall wed Maharaja Jagat Singh, as my word has gone.

SINDHIA (*savagely, shouting*): Then she shall not need torches for the marriage procession. The flaming towers of Udaipur shall light it. You think I am going to bandy words with you, when my mind is made up! I broke your army and Jagat Singh's at the battle of the pass. All that night, and for a day after, your dead were burning. What force is yours? Where is your army? Go a hundred yards up this hill, and you can see where their relics lie. Let Jagat Singh go now—before we drive him away like the dog that he is. Receive the messengers of my friend Raja Man Singh.

BHIM SINGH (*facing him fearlessly*): How can I insult Jagat Singh so? He would be Mewar's mortal enemy.

SINDHIA: Choose between his enmity and mine.

SARUP SINGH: Your enmity, jackal! The dog hunts the lion, when the village is with him! You would not face the Rana with such words, if you had not forty thousand thieves at your back.

AMBAJI (*in shocked tones*): This is not the way to speak to the Maharaja, least of all when he is offering you an honourable peace.

SARUP SINGH (*turning on him with a voice of thunder*): What have you to say in this, white-bearded grandfather of all villains? There is not a heart in Mewar that does not curse you.

SINDHIA (*trying to recover an appearance of moderation*): Your Excellency sees the senseless pride and insolence of these Rajputs! One is for giving his daughter to a worthless fellow, a coward whom I have already driven from the field; the other takes advantage of your presence to offer me intolerable insults. (*To* SARUP SINGH) It is only respect for these English gentlemen that prevents me from making you eat your words.

AJIT SINGH: We are forgetting Rana Bhim Singh, whom we have met to help.

SARUP SINGH (*in an ecstasy of rage*): Forgetting Rana Bhim Singh! This from the chief of all traitors, the man who has forgotten his Rana for ten years! If there were not thousands like you, the lion would not have been brought low by this pack of jackals.

MERCER (*hurriedly*): Gentlemen, we are getting heated, and things have been said which I am sure were not meant. Let us look at the matter calmly, and see if

we cannot find some peaceful settlement. My Government is deeply concerned for the restoration of this ancient and renowned kingdom.

SINDHIA (*almost insolently*): But not, I think, your Excellency, to the extent of offering Mewar alliance or any help?

MERCER (*chagrined*): No, I have no such instructions. My Government wishes to preserve the strictest neutrality, desiring only that the ruling princes should come to honourable agreements among themselves.

SINDHIA (*triumphantly*): You hear, Rana. You should have learnt this last year, when you sent a secret embassy to Lake Saheb(11) asking for help against us.

MERCER (*stiffening again*): Maharaja, it will be better if you leave my Government out of this discussion. We have no wish to do anything but stand aside from your quarrels.

SINDHIA: I beg your Excellency's pardon; but it is good that the Rana should be reminded of his disloyalty at a time when all Hindus should have been like brothers. It has left him very few friends. (*To* RANA BHIM SINGH) Why am I using argument when I should command? Mewar is no longer an independent state. It has paid me tribute for many years. Where is Jagat Singh?

BHIM SINGH: Where should my accepted son-in-law be?

SINDHIA: You mean, he is in Udaipur. Raja Man Singh's heralds will bring their bridal gifts by this time to-morrow; Udaipur will be in festival to receive them. Jagat Singh will have been dismissed.

SARUP SINGH: Will the bridal gifts be those that thieves have already looted from Jagat Singh?

AMBAJI: Sarup Singh has a bitter tongue. Perhaps he will put it to better use than gibes, and tell his Rana what he thinks he should do.

SARUP SINGH: I wish that he could defy all the Man Singhs and Sindhias that ever came out of hell. (*Subsiding.*) But Fate has brought us lower than Mewar's sons were ever brought before.

SINDHIA: Rana Bhim Singh has not answered.

BHIM SINGH: I cannot dishonour my word.

SINDHIA (*bellowing*): Do you look to save the palaces of Udaipur? Or even its bare walls? I will flood it with the troops of Amir Khan the Pathan if you dishonour me or break your promise to Raja Man Singh.

SARUP SINGH (*rising in his excitement*): There was no promise, as is well known to everyone here.

AMBAJI: It is the Maharaja who is speaking to the Rana.

SARUP SINGH: Let the Rana do what he thinks best. But let no one speak that word *promise* again.

SINDHIA (*shrinking before* SARUP SINGH's *gaze*): Well, I will not quarrel about a matter of words.

AMBAJI: Rana Bhim Singh, listen to me, an old man who knew your father and his father's father. Is the glorious city, which has come down to you from your ancestors, to be destroyed by your obstinacy? (*He looks dreamily at the tent roof, then continues.*) There are hostages from your family in our hands. The Maharaja

Sindhia has taken exceeding care of them, as being dear to one whom he loves and honours. But, supposing this meeting should end in a quarrel between friends, the Maharaja in his indignation might neglect them and they might suffer hardship at the hands of others who are less thoughtful.

[TOD *makes an excited movement, as if about to speak, but* MERCER *checks him. There is silence, broken only by* SINDHIA'S *restless tossing on his cushion.*

BHIM SINGH: I am in your hands. God has left me powerless.

AMBAJI (*to* SINDHIA): The Maharana has seen what is right and will do it.

SINDHIA (*with a hasty resumption of affability*): I knew that Maharana Bhim Singh would think of Udaipur first. Now we are all friends again. (*With a very ineffective jocularity he looks round the company.*) All this trouble between grown men over a girl! (*To* BHIM SINGH) Raja Man Singh's proposals will be formally laid before you to-morrow. (*He claps his hands, and an attendant appears with* pan.) (12)

BHIM SINGH (*to* SINDHIA): Maharaja, let me take my leave. (*He rises and salutes the company severally, then makes his way out swiftly, followed by* SARUP SINGH. *Shouts of* Raj-Raj-Iswara *are heard from the road, and the clatter of hoofs, as the Rajputs ride away.*)

SINDHIA (*accepting* pan *from the attendant*): The Rana takes a wilful and unreasonable view of things. He will see them better when he is alone.

[*The* pan *is accepted by all the company;* TOD *hesitates, but at a look from* MERCER *takes it, acknowledging it by a salute.*

(*With excessive joviality.*) Well, everything is satisfactorily settled. (*He takes a second* pan.) How will my English friends pass the last hour before darkness? Would they care to discuss this matter further with me in my tent?

MERCER (*as they all rise*): Thank you, Maharaja. But we have no right to trouble you further. May we stay here, and look over the temple?

SINDHIA (*disappointed*): Oh, certainly. By all means. I will stay and show you over it.

MERCER: You are very kind indeed, Maharaja. But Mr. Tod and I will not have time to do more than just glance round the outside of it.

[*After ceremonial leave-taking,* SINDHIA, MAN SINGH, AMBAJI, *and* AJIT SINGH *go out.*

TOD: I'm glad to see their backs.

MERCER: What a damned fool you are, Tod! You'll get into no end of a mess if you insult ruling princes in their own camp.

TOD: I didn't go so far as all that, did I?

MERCER: All but. You'll have to keep your thoughts to yourself, if you want to get anywhere in this country. Our job is to be neutral. Barlow isn't going to get into any of these native rows just at present. (*Mollifying.*) What did you think of the Rana?

TOD: A god, beside those fellows.

MERCER: I wouldn't be a woman in this country for a great deal. (*Is thoughtful a moment.*) And yet it's like the *Iliad* over again. Here are four kings of sorts have been fighting over one girl. They say she's a miracle of loveliness—(*musingly*) the Flower of Rajasthan! She'd be a reigning toast in our country.

TOD: I say, sir, must we leave her to be torn up in their quarrels, and that fine chap of a Rana ground underneath a bit of dirt like Sindhia? I feel as if I were at a tragedy, and wanting to shout out to the hero that he was being made a fool of, and that the whole thing was quite simple.

MERCER: But it isn't simple. The Rana couldn't do anything else; (*thoughtfully*) yet what he has done hasn't helped him. I wouldn't give much for the chances of his keeping the promise they think they've got out of him.

TOD: The awful thing is, it's our Government that has chucked the Rana to the wolves. If anything happens to him or that girl their blood will be on our heads.

MERCER (*shrugging his shoulders*): Oh, I don't know. We're not our brother's keeper, you know. And it isn't as if these Rajputs hadn't their own headstrong ways of making themselves miserable. We can't do anything. How is John Company going to pay his shareholders' dividends if he imagines he's St. George and goes about killing all sorts of dragons? They like Barlow in Leadenhall Street.(13) He keeps down the expenses of running the business. Oh, it's a tragedy that's going forward, right

enough. But remember, you and I can't do anything but just look on. We can't even shout at the actors. Come along; it'll be getting dark.

[MERCER *and* TOD *wander off to the temple.*

CURTAIN.

ACT II



ACT II

The "Hall of the Sun," an audience room in the palace of the Rana of Mewar. The walls and floor are of whitest marble. The only decoration is a huge medallion of the Sun, the ancestor of the Sisodias, which, carved in bas-relief and heavily gilded, shines in the centre of the back wall. Close to it is placed the Rana's gadi, *a large cushion over which is flung an embroidered mantle of crimson velvet. Above the* gadi *rises a velvet canopy, supported by slender silver columns.*

A door in the right wall. To the left, a balcony overlooking—far below—the roofs of the city of Udaipur and giving a view of hills beyond.

It is the morning of the second day. BHIM SINGH *is alone with* SARUP SINGH; *they are standing on the balcony.*

BHIM SINGH: Then Jagat Singh will not rest?

SARUP SINGH: Rest? We have rubbed his eyes in the dust. But he is a small matter. The bear will leave us alone till the tiger has finished with us. (*Pointing outward from the roof.*) That is Sindhia's cannon yonder. Will you see his messenger?

BHIM SINGH (*evading the question*): Sarup Singh! Jagat Singh has been broken because he was our friend.

SARUP SINGH: There could be no better reason. Every friend of Mewar has been broken. Forget him; we have joyful work on hand. Krishna is to be a bride, and we must fill our streets with lamps and music.

BHIM SINGH: You have no pity. You forget I am her father.

SARUP SINGH: Nothing in Mewar has ever had any pity. This tale will end the old way.

BHIM SINGH: What way?

SARUP SINGH: With agony, and—glory! Krishna will be a theme for our minstrels, while Mewar's name lasts.

BHIM SINGH: My Krishna! She is a child!

SARUP SINGH: She is fifteen years old. She is old enough to suffer.

BHIM SINGH (*exaltedly*): There are no women like our Rajput women. The whole earth rings with their glory.

SARUP SINGH: We drug ourselves with glory. We fill the burning-ground with flutes and drums and chanting of crazy women. And when the mind grows desolate, our minstrels clamour and drum, and we pretend all is well.

BHIM SINGH: Our ancestors——

SARUP SINGH: I have ceased to be sure about our ancestors. Once I thought them gods and heroes. Now I wonder if they were barbarians.

BHIM SINGH (*shocked*): Barbarians!

SARUP SINGH: All through my youth I was drunk with their glory. Even when my only child, who ought to have been playing in my home, was burnt to ashes in my sight, beside a corpse that was nothing to her, I strangled—yes, I strangled; it needed more than coaxing or quieting, I can tell you—my heart's misery with thoughts of her glorious dying. (*He pauses and does not speak for a few moments.*) But it was not silenced so. Then I left Udaipur, and joined Sindhia.(14) I met foreigners, who laughed at our customs. Some of them hated us for them. They do not treat their women so; and their women are as loving and lovely as ours. But we

are fated. Something—some Demon, I think—has told us to perish, age after age, and fooled us that we did it for glory.

Bhim Singh: How unpatriotic you have grown! You hate Mewar.

Sarup Singh (*with concentrated bitterness*): There is no Mewar. There is nothing but this central squalor round a lake. There are not ten villages where they have gathered a blade of harvest this year. Look from this roof. Where are the houses? Their rafters have gone for firewood.(15) When fire breaks out in our plains they burn bare, and no second fire can feed on them. But Mewar has been swept by fire after fire, and still new fire finds fuel somewhere in our nakedness. That is what glory has done for us. It has made Destruction at home with us. The Goddess of Mewar(16) finds our own blood sweeter than any other that we can offer her.

Bhim Singh: Blaspheme not, Sarup Singh. That glorious Battle-Queen will save us.

Sarup Singh: She has never saved us. She has summoned and summoned, to her funeral-pyres and her carnage-heaps. Age after age, she has called, "I am hungry. Sons of the Sisodias, give me food." And we have glutted her with kings and nobles and flocks of queens. With her ten arms she has swept us in, and drunk our lives. She has revelled in our wretchedness, she has reeled with our blood. To-day we die in our squalor, no man pitying us. A stray Mahratta trooper cuts down our Rajputs as they run. Nay, more than half the Mahratta troopers *are* Rajputs, ravaging their own flesh and blood. The baggage-tats of the Pindaris(17) foul our ripe corn.

The Pathan laughs as he spears the child whom he forced on a Rajput womb when he burnt the village a couple of years ago.

BHIM SINGH (*with an appearance of resolution*): Your bitter talk has decided me. I will summon my sirdars, and lead them against Sindhia. I will have the kettle-drums beaten, and these plains shall hear them throbbing for vengeance, as they did through the centuries from Chitor.(18) The whole earth trembles at the Sisodia name. I will carry that name into battle.

SARUP SINGH: Your sirdars will not come. You have servants no longer; you have only rebels. Mewar's own sons have slain her. Sir, better see Sindhia's messenger.

[RANA BHIM SINGH *nods, and* SARUP SINGH *goes to the door and calls. There is an answering shout; then the* MESSENGER *of* SINDHIA *is brought in by a Rajput soldier, who goes out again. The* MESSENGER, *by a refinement of insolence, is a Pathan, one of the many Mussulman mercenaries in* SINDHIA'S *army; an officer of inferior rank. He makes obeisance.*

MESSENGER: Long life to Rana Bhim Singh, the Lion of Mewar! I come from those mighty lords, the Maharajadhiraja Daulat Rao Sindhia and the Maharajadhiraja Man Singh, Lord of Jodhpur.

BHIM SINGH (*with dignity*): Have they withdrawn their armies, as I commanded?

MESSENGER: They have, sir; two leagues nearer Udaipur since your gracious order reached them yesterday. They would have moved faster, but it was slow work, when we had to burn every hovel and devour every blade of green.

SARUP SINGH (*threateningly*): You speak to the Chief of the Sisodias, the master of your master.

MESSENGER: I must deliver my message. The Maharaja Sindhia says he will stall his elephants in your palace ere two days be over. But he gives you still this chance to win his friendship and protection.

BHIM SINGH (*desperately*): May I not answer this insolence?

SARUP SINGH: Better hear him to the end. What chance, most courteous servant of a most kindly lord?

MESSENGER: Fulfil your acceptance of Raja Man Singh's offer to receive your daughter, provide a fitting dowry, proclaim her betrothal, and they will forget the trouble you have caused them.

SARUP SINGH: That, then, is his friendship, I take it. But you also spoke of his protection? We would not lose anything of such a message as yours.

MESSENGER: Why, his friendship *is* his protection. If any foe loots you after he has gone, that foe will sorely regret it when the Maharaja Sindhia comes this way again.

BHIM SINGH (*with despairing dignity*): Return to Raja Man Singh, and ask him has he forgotten that he is a Rajput, that he oppresses the House of the Sisodias in their evil day? I have dishonoured my name for ever, in driving from us my daughter's affianced lord at the command of that Mahratta thief who comes with him.

MESSENGER (*with recovered insolence*): I am going to speak for that Mahratta thief. He has sent this private word for you, O Chief of the Sisodias—nay, why private?

Presently the whole world shall hear it spoken. Man Singh is my servant; with what my sword reaps I can reward him. Why should he wear the Flower of Rajasthan? She is a blossom meant for the neck of an emperor. Tell Rana Bhim Singh Delhi's walls are crumbling, the Rajputs' day is finished; the English, who threatened our faith and our rule, have grown weak and cowardly and are begging for my alliance. I, Sindhia, will wed your child, and I will build the walls of Udaipur again. Then thou and I will sweep the land free of these aliens who pollute it, and I will be crowned at Delhi, and Krishna shall be my Queen.

BHIM SINGH (*unable to believe that he has heard aright*): Goddess of Chitor, am I to answer such a message?

MESSENGER: I am to take an answer back.

BHIM SINGH: Then tell that cattle-lifter that the blood of the Sisodias has never mingled with slime. And for your other master, whose house has reared its brides for the harem,(19) tell him to say his prayers at the mosque and beg Allah for a bride. Our alliance is not for the slaves of the Mussulman and the Mahratta.

MESSENGER: I will tell them both. And I think I shall not have to return. Sindhia will bring his own answer. [*Exit.*

BHIM SINGH: Sarup Singh, I have ruined Mewar.

SARUP SINGH: You could have made no other answer. If your blood had always stood at this pitch your sirdars would have followed you.

BHIM SINGH: Friend, no other Rana saw my sorrows. Pratap Singh was hunted by the Moguls, as they hunt lions with their nets; but he had faithful followers. My

Rajputs are busy with loot and murder, or else nigh dead with despair. When I promised Krishna to Jagat Singh I would have kept my word; but I saw my army driven from the pass, and Sindhia is on our heels. When I spoke with him at Eklinga I was a broken man. I do not know what I promised. I may have promised my child to this son-in-law of *mlecchas*(20) who comes from Jodhpur. I dismissed Jagat Singh, and made him my enemy for ever. Then my Rajput strength came back——

SARUP SINGH (*unpityingly*): So you sent that fine, ringing order that the victorious armies should hurry from our territory. I saw it afterwards. It was grandly worded. Any minstrel might have been proud of it.

BHIM SINGH (*appealingly*): If you cannot show me any way out from this utter destruction that has come upon us, be silent. Do you think my own thoughts cannot madden me?

[*He is silent for a few moments, thinking.*

Sarup Singh, is there no hope in the English?

SARUP SINGH: None at all.

BHIM SINGH: Yet all the world knows, for all his bluster, that they have chased this Mahratta thief in from both north and south(21) and driven him upon Rajasthan. He ravages here because he has no other refuge. There were Englishmen at Eklinga.

SARUP SINGH: Sindhia wished to show us what fine beasts he had caught. If our minds strayed to dreams of their aid, they were there for us to see—only less in his nets than we ourselves. They have no help to give us. The English are shopkeepers who fight when they must. Sindhia elbowed his way against them, so they pushed

him sprawling. For the present they are content, and will not thrust him further. After we are dead, his power will be ripe to fall into their hands.

BHIM SINGH: After we are dead?

SARUP SINGH: Within ten years every true son of the Sisodias will be dead with shame. Then Sindhia and Holkar will be a mere police affair; the English will round them up as we round up a pair of palace servants who have stolen an old cow.

BHIM SINGH: But if we offered them alliance?

SARUP SINGH: They might accept it; I cannot say. Fifteen, ten years later, they might see it through. But now they would use us and leave us, as they have used and left others.(22) Their power is an ocean in whose edges an infant can paddle; we are but its margin. We can merely hear its breaking spray. You asked for their alliance three years ago, and they refused. Sindhia pillaged Mewar of twenty *lakhs* when he heard.

[*Enter* AJIT SINGH.

(*Scornfully and angrily.*) Another messenger from the Mahratta!

AJIT SINGH (*defiantly*): Thank the fates of Mewar that it is a Rajput, for it will not be again. Sindhia is breaking up camp, to march against us.

SARUP SINGH: Swiftly back then, lest he be delayed without his guide!

BHIM SINGH: Sarup Singh, your tongue has wounded Mewar more deeply than the treachery of others has done. Ajit Singh is a Sisodia, and has been our only friend at Man Singh's camp.

SARUP SINGH: No doubt that is why our enemies found the way to turn our position at the pass. I have my hands full of proofs of his friendliness.

AJIT SINGH: You have presumed on your place as the Rana's counsellor. For this speech you shall have my sword-hilt in your face.

BHIM SINGH (*stepping between them*): You will strike your Rana first, then. Sarup Singh, I have borne with your bitter speeches to me, I have borne with your hatred of Mewar and your blasphemy against our Goddess. You shall not wrong my friends and divide us yet further. Make your peace with Ajit Singh.

[*Enter* SANGRAM SINGH. *He is an old man, his beard and hair snowy-white. He is wildly excited.*

SARUP SINGH (*taking advantage of the confusion caused by* SANGRAM SINGH'S *entrance, and speaking aside to* AJIT SINGH *in a low tone*): I will make my peace with Ajit Singh at leisure.

SANGRAM SINGH: What is this story that Sindhia will become the Chief of the Sisodias' son-in-law?

BHIM SINGH (*with angry dignity*): No story that is true. Sangram Singh, have you also become a madman?

SANGRAM SINGH: Then tell your people that it is not true. Come outside with me and shout it abroad.

BHIM SINGH (*utterly astonished*): Sangram Singh, am I still the Chief of the Sisodias? Or have all my followers turned rebel? Here are two brawling in my presence, and you rush in with insult! What does the tiger care if a tale is abroad that the jackal says he is to become his son-in-law?

SANGRAM SINGH: He cares so much that he rips the jackal up.

BHIM SINGH (*distressed*): Sangram Singh, you know I cannot. You know how low our power has fallen.

SANGRAM SINGH: I know that we can die in the Rajput way. Light the funeral pyres, and let the drums summon our wives and daughters. We will join them in the house of the Sun, our ancestor, before their ashes have grown cold.

BHIM SINGH (*with bewildered enthusiasm*): My heart tells me you are right. I will do it.

SARUP SINGH: My head tells me you are both wrong. The world does not fight that way now. And, when we did, it did us no good.

SANGRAM SINGH (*almost speechless with indignation*): It saved Mewar.

SARUP SINGH: It slew Mewar. Chitor for these two centuries and more has been the lair of leopards. The snake king holds his court where queens couched. There are wolves in Padmani's bridal chamber.

SANGRAM SINGH (*rapturously*): The place where our fathers perished is holy for evermore.

SARUP SINGH: Go there. You will find the lilith seated where our women burned.(23) At night the hillside which our fathers fattened with their flesh is a sea of fiery eyes.(24) That is why we can never return. Devils have made it their city. Sangram Singh, the *jauhar*(25) never saved Mewar; and it cannot save Mewar now. Listen to me, you two who think me no true Rajput. (*Bitterly.*) Gather your handful of faithful ones! Fight

Sindhia! Perish; of course, our women will have died first!

SANGRAM SINGH: That is our glorious Rajput way. Nowhere else in the whole world can they die as our Rajputs die.

SARUP SINGH: They are fortunate. They live to reap our fields, and to sing praise of our valour. I do not know what the minstrels of Hindusthan would do if it were not for us. But, after all, is Mewar to perish again, just that the world may have another song? If we all die, Sindhia's line will reign in Udaipur, and the House of Bappa(26) will be ended. Oh, you think I am no true son of the Sisodias. You say, Sarup Singh is brave in battle, but he is crazed and has lost his love for Mewar. Listen to me. Once I thought as you do; yes, as you, Sangram Singh. No man bragged or dreamed more of our ancestors' glory and valour. Even now, when a fight is beginning, I hear the old music—a music of devils I may think it now, but it is good music for a man to march to battle to, good music to die to. You all know that I served with the last Sindhia. In his army were men of all nations——(27)

SANGRAM SINGH: Thieves of all nations, you mean.

SARUP SINGH: Yes, mostly thieves. There was a young Englishman who was my friend. He kindled to my stories of Chitor, and longed to see it. So I took him there, and for a whole day we tramped its fallen walls and jungles. The place lit a flame in my blood, and I think it did in his, too. And I believed in my ancestors; never have I believed in them as I did that day. I told him of our *jauhars*, I gloried as a Sisodia should. He said nothing, merely passing in astonishment from one vast gate to the

next. I glowed with pride, for I thought he was silent from amazement at our valour. At last he spoke. "Did Akbar capture Chitor?" he asked. "Yes," I said. 'And Allah-ud-din?" "Yes," I said. "It has been three times utterly sacked." Then he laughed. "Those old Mussulmans must have been brave fellows," he said. "No," I told him. "It was our Rajputs who were brave. Three times they sent their wives and daughters into the flames, and then rushed to their own death outside the walls." "And why?" he asked. So I told him of our great Goddess, the holy Guardian of Chitor, and how, age after age, she has stood and called for the blood of our kings and nobles. He seemed to understand; but I do not think he respected us any the more.

Sangram Singh (*angrily*): The man was a foreigner, and an unbeliever. Why do you tell us what he thought?

Ajit Singh: Did you not explain that we were forced to act as we did from want of food?

Sarup Singh: I did. But he said, "Three times makes it look like a Rajput habit."

Bhim Singh: Did he not see how brave our fathers were?

Sarup Singh: I cannot say if he saw. What he said was, "I used to think, from what I had heard, that the Rajputs alone of all people did not know fear. But now I see that despair was your kind of fear." I was angry, and I said that despair was not fear. "At any rate, it did the same work," he replied.

Bhim Singh (*scornfully*): Did he ever say what the English would have done at Chitor?

SARUP SINGH: I asked him. He said, "They would not have burnt their women. They would have stayed inside their walls. And I think, though I am not sure, that they would have kept Chitor."

SANGRAM SINGH (*almost beside himself with indignation*): Sarup Singh, now I know that you hate your country.

BHIM SINGH (*decidedly*): No human power could have kept Chitor.

SARUP SINGH: It may be so.

SANGRAM SINGH: Sarup Singh, do you think the English braver than the Rajputs?

SARUP SINGH: I do not think they are so brave. My English friend did not think they were. He said there were no nobler warriors in the whole world than the Sisodias, if it were not that their brains had poison in them. The English have no Guardian Goddess clamouring for their blood. They have only enemies to fight; we have the despair in our hearts.

BHIM SINGH: But what will you have us do?

SANGRAM SINGH: Yes, what? We know what our fathers did. But they were actors, while we are thinkers.

SARUP SINGH: The trouble is, we are not thinkers. We are Rajputs. We do what we have always done. And the particular set of our fathers who started our fashions lived when Rajasthan was full of woods, and those woods full of wild men. We are still acting in the same way, in a world that is full of Moguls and French and English and Mahrattas.

AJIT SINGH: Sarup Singh speaks truth.

Sarup Singh (*turning on him savagely*): *You* agree with me, do you? Then there must be some root of rascal cowardice in what I say. Yet I have hoped that I talked and thought not altogether unlike a Rajput. Sangram Singh, you know me a true Rajput?

Sangram Singh: You talk as if you hated Mewar. But you always fight like a Rajput.

Ajit Singh (*slowly*): You have called me a coward.

Sarup Singh: Let me withdraw the word, and call you a traitor instead. We have forgotten; you have not given us your message from your Mahratta master.

Bhim Singh (*angrily*): Sarup Singh——

Sarup Singh: He has been in Mahratta camps more often than in ours, ever since those locusts settled on the land.

Ajit Singh: You have been in Mahratta camps yourself. You served with the last Sindhia for five years.

Sarup Singh: I do not serve them when they are flaying my country. (*To* Rana Bhim Singh.) I will be silent. Ajit Singh, I hope I have done you wrong. God! once again Mewar is bleeding, and bleeding for the sake of a woman.

Sangram Singh (*reminded of his reason for coming*): Sir, you will never give your child to that Mahratta slipper-bearer.([28])

Bhim Singh: I will drown her in our waters first.

Sangram Singh: I will gather our folk and scatter these bandits. Padmani([29]) has come to us again. Did our fathers grudge their dying to save Padmani from dishonour?

AJIT SINGH (*at last introducing his point*): Was it well that Mewar perished for a woman?

SARUP SINGH (*waving the whole subject aside*): We had best forget our fathers once for all.

AJIT SINGH (*doggedly*): The Rana will have to say if Krishna is more to him than Mewar. It is for him to save his people.

BHIM SINGH (*turning to him incredulously*): Would you have me send her to Sindhia? Or to this Rajput traitor who has brought Sindhia upon us again?

AJIT SINGH (*deprecatingly*): We use the word *traitor* too much. After all, he *is* a Rajput. At Eklinga, you consented to accept him as your son-in-law.

BHIM SINGH: I do not know what I said at Eklinga. But I would rather see my child dead.

AJIT SINGH (*returning to his point*): Then, after all, Mewar *is* more to you than a girl. One girl—your daughter; but she is only a woman, and one woman—does not seem dearer to you than this holiest land of Hindusthan, made sacred by our ancestors' glorious deeds?

SARUP SINGH (*turning on him with utter suspicion*): What villainy is in your mind?

SANGRAM SINGH: I am going. I cannot endure any more of this talk. Neither Ajit Singh nor Sarup Singh has any plan. I will be back in two days, and will find a Rajput way out of these miseries. (*To* SARUP SINGH.) You never weary of reviling our Rajput ways, but you have no new ones to offer.

SARUP SINGH: You are right. It is wretched to be alive now, when the old light has gone out and the new shows us only precipices.

BHIM SINGH (*appealingly*): Give us your plan, Sarup Singh.

SARUP SINGH: I have none, as Sangram Singh says. How should I have a plan? I also am a Rajput. I think we Rajputs for a while will have to learn from some other nation, less generous, less gallant, but wiser, saner, less barbaric.

SANGRAM SINGH: We have no need to learn from any but ourselves. There is not a rock where some old Rajput man-at-arms is not lurking; and they will all start up for their princess. Krishna is Mewar. She shall die for Mewar, and Mewar for her. She is the flower of all our flowers, and shall never be dishonoured. I will save Mewar, and in the old way. [*Exit*.

SARUP SINGH: Ajit Singh, now speak what is in your mind. Sangram Singh has gone.

AJIT SINGH: Nothing is in my mind, but that I would see some way to save Mewar.

SARUP SINGH: You mean, you do see some way, but that the way is not honest.

AJIT SINGH: Sarup Singh, it is not *my* way, whatever I may think of it. Hear me, Rana Bhim Singh. After the battle of the pass our valley was lit with funeral fires. Sarup Singh has said, Mewar lies bleeding for the sake of one woman.

BHIM SINGH: Had I foreseen a tenth of our sorrows because of her I would have slain my child when she was born![30]

AJIT SINGH (*piously*): Then you would have lost these years of unexampled loveliness, of sweetness that has

made her name a glory for ever. All our poets have sung of the Flower of Rajasthan.

SARUP SINGH: I wish we had a law by which all our poets perished in their infancy! They have lied, and lied, and lied to us, till we have become a byword for folly. It is this praise of theirs that has brought every wasp in India round our honey.

BHIM SINGH: No, it is our weakness that has brought them.

SARUP SINGH: Our weakness and our boasting. We clamour that we have treasure, when we have no strength to keep it. We may be glad that the Mogul's day is over, or our Flower would have been cut for a *mleccha's* bed.

BHIM SINGH (*white with rage*): Dare you utter such a word to the Chief of the Sisodias?

SARUP SINGH (*defensively*): An Akbar or an Aurangzeb would have demanded your child.

BHIM SINGH: We should have flung the insult back in his teeth.

SARUP SINGH (*waiving the point*): Had we not better hear Ajit Singh's message?

AJIT SINGH (*feigning surprise*): What message?

SARUP SINGH: I know well that you did not come merely to sympathise with us in our wretchedness. You come from Man Singh's camp. You are Man Singh's friend. Ajit Singh, you have waited till Sangram Singh went to say what is in your mind. You need not hope that I shall go before you have spoken it.

AJIT SINGH (*to* BHIM SINGH): Then, sir, forgive me if what I have to say pierces your soul. But you are a

Sisodia, the Chief of the Sisodias, and it has always been our Ranas whose anguish has turned away our Guardian Queen's anger. Sir, you love Mewar?

BHIM SINGH: Ajit Singh, the horror of waiting for your words is unbearable. If you have any love for Mewar or me, your Rana, say simply what you mean.

AJIT SINGH (*with apparent reluctance*): You force me to speak my message harshly, when I would have given it by degrees.

SARUP SINGH: Are you a devil? What does the manner of your message matter if it is going to pierce the Rana's soul?

AJIT SINGH: Then, sir, have you not promised your daughter to Man Singh?

BHIM SINGH: I have. That is disgrace enough to madden my remaining years. My word has been broken to Jagat Singh.

AJIT SINGH (*moving more swiftly to his point*): It matters little, for Man Singh will never have your child. Sindhia is master here, and, though your consent may go to Man Singh, your daughter will go to the Mahratta.

[BHIM SINGH *starts in utter abandonment of passion.*

Sir, hear me to the end. Sindhia has forced a quarrel on Man Singh about the payment of his troops; that is why he has not yet moved his camp upon you. Man Singh has no power, and must give way. He is not a Sisodia, and will never risk his kingdom for the sake of a woman. But he will not allow Krishna to become the bride of another.

BHIM SINGH: She shall never go to Sindhia's bed! I will myself kill her rather.

AJIT SINGH (*leaping to his point at last*): That is my message. Man Singh sends you this word: Why should the House of the Sisodias perish for a girl?

BHIM SINGH (*bewildered*): Ajit Singh, what can I do?

AJIT SINGH: Man Singh says: Let the girl die. It is but a knife-plunge, and Mewar's misery is over.

SARUP SINGH (*shouting*): No, Mewar's misery is beginning afresh. This at least is not one of our customs, to kill our children to save ourselves.

AJIT SINGH (*doggedly*): Man Singh says: Let Krishna die. Then all these wars will finish.

BHIM SINGH (*as if stunned*): Is this our Guardian Goddess crying for the last destruction of Mewar?

AJIT SINGH: She is offering us final safety. Never before has she offered it so cheaply.

SARUP SINGH (*incredulous*): This message came from the man who sought to be Krishna's lord?

AJIT SINGH: If your child wed Sindhia——

BHIM SINGH: She shall wed my dagger! Do not dare to utter that slave's name again with mine!

AJIT SINGH (*persistent*): If she wed Man Singh, Sindhia —forgive me, sir!—will slay him. Then—if she is fortunate—she will mount her lord's pyre. Sir, it is not Sindhia alone that we have to fear. Amir Khan has said, Delhi needs another Akbar; the blood of Babar(31) runs too palely; Akbar's sons had Rajput mothers.

BHIM SINGH: No daughter of Mewar ever entered a *mleccha's* harem.

AJIT SINGH: Says Amir Khan: No Rana of Mewar ever sank so low in power. Granted that you keep your hateful promise to Man Singh, what remains but war on war, till Krishna dies? Sindhia will not go; Jagat Singh will return and avenge himself. Save her from dishonour now, and your land from misery upon misery.

BHIM SINGH (*desperately*): Sarup Singh, will you not say anything?

SARUP SINGH (*making to go*): I have said a great deal. Any way is nobler than this!

BHIM SINGH: Where are you going?

SARUP SINGH (*wildly*): I am going to join Sangram Singh. [*Exit.*

[BHIM SINGH *goes to the parapet and gazes out over Udaipur, silent.*)

AJIT SINGH (*approaching him*): Sir, you have given way to your grief.

[BHIM SINGH *does not answer.*

AJIT SINGH (*after a pause*): Sir, there is very little time.

BHIM SINGH: Am I to be spared no degradation? That a Pathan should dream of alliance with the blood of the Sisodias!

AJIT SINGH: Only you can save your child and Mewar. Look from this roof and see the dust of Sindhia's stirring. If you will not choose between a girl and your people, at least choose between your child's death and her dishonour. Only you can make this choice. (*After silence.*) Let our country plead with you. You are the father not of Krishna only, but of all your people now slain with this perpetual march and counter-march of war.

[BHIM SINGH *remains silent, with his head sunk in his hands.*

Sir, you know what all our people say, that she is Padmani's self back in flesh among us.

[BHIM SINGH *groans.*

In five hundred years there has been no such flower of Rajput loveliness. If she is that great spirit, as your people say, will she not be glad to die that Mewar may have peace again? This is the eighth year that Sindhia has reaped our harvests.

BHIM SINGH (*looking up*): Do you know when Sindhia will march?

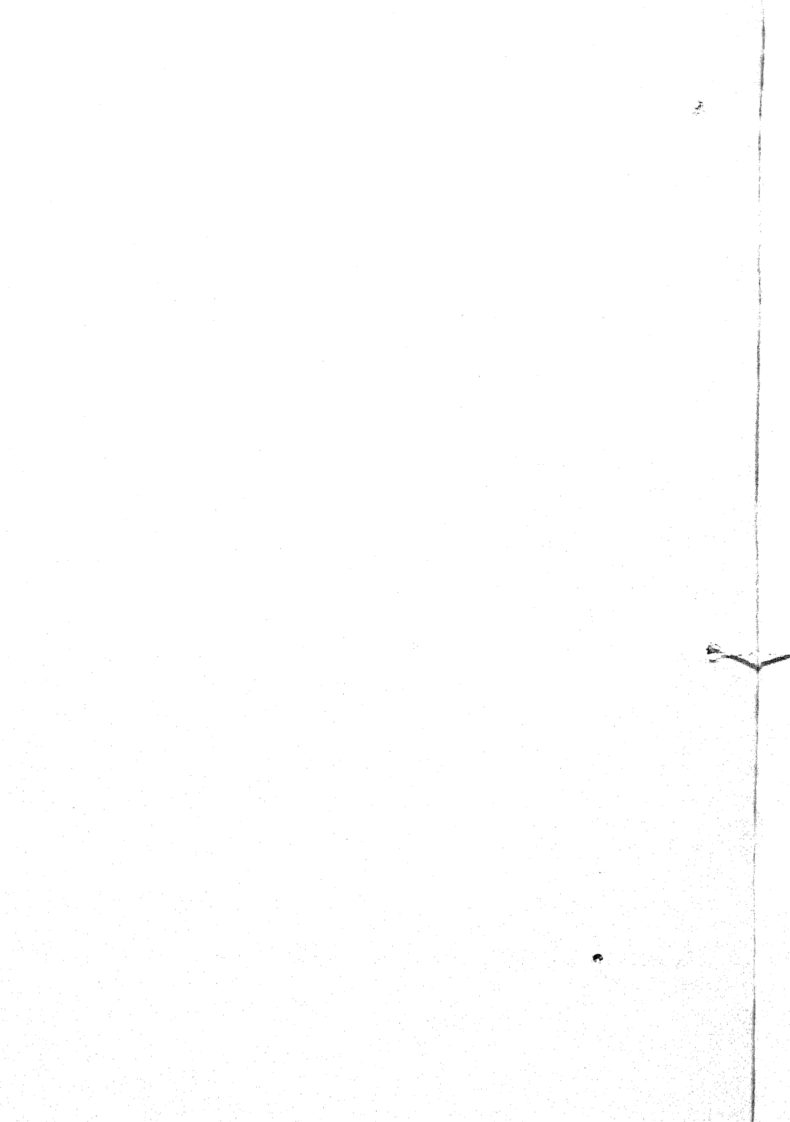
AJIT SINGH (*disconcerted*): I am with Man Singh. I do not serve a Mahratta.

BHIM SINGH (*not noticing his evasion, and repeating the question*): When will he reach our walls, do you think? You said he had already broken camp.

AJIT SINGH: No, not broken, but about to break camp. There has been delay, and he moves slowly. But he will be in Udaipur before to-morrow's sunset.

BHIM SINGH: Go, tell him and Man Singh that Rana Bhim Singh has saved his child.

CURTAIN.



ACT III

ACT III

An enclosed garden in the women's apartments of one of the island palaces. High walls of the white palace buildings to left and right. Across the back—between these walls—a long, veranda-like structure of white marble, its roof supported by graceful arches through which can be seen the blue waters of the Pichola Lake, the glittering walls of another island palace, the green lake-shore of rank pasture-land and dense reed-beds, and, above and beyond, the grey and purple hills.

The garden itself is an unkempt tangle of shrubs and small trees—limes, citrons, hibiscus, roses, pomegranates—all parched with heat and flowerless, except for a scattering of white and yellow stars on the jasmine bushes and a few scarlet bells and trumpets of hibiscus. Three tall coconut palms rise at the back of the garden. Toward the front of the garden, at the left of the path, stands a small shrine of the Goddess Kali. The Goddess herself, a terrible figure of glistening, oil-polished black, ten-armed and menacing, is seen in profile.

The time is evening, and the sunset is already burning the waters of the lake and sending long rays through the white arches. During the scene the stage darkens rapidly with the swift Indian night.

The PRINCESS KRISHNA *is in the garden with her friend* LAKSHMI *and a* SERVANT.

KRISHNA: If you are going to say these things, you must leave me. I have said farewell to all but you, my childhood's friend; I asked that you might stay with me. All those thoughts I have faced, and driven them from me.

LAKSHMI: Do not send me away. It is because our whole land loves you that we are weeping.

KRISHNA: If you would help me, be silent.

[*Wailing and piercing shrieks of lamentation from the building.*

(*To the* SERVANT.) Kamala, take my request to these outside. Ask that this wailing may cease. Do not return.

[*Exit* SERVANT.

LAKSHMI (*weeping*): Do you want me to go away?

KRISHNA: No, do not leave me. Those ghosts may come again when they find me alone.

LAKSHMI: Ghosts?

KRISHNA: They are in my heart. (*She is silent. Then she gathers hibiscus flowers*(32) *and lays them before the Image of Kali.*) Lakshmi, this is a wonderful thing that has come to me. Here I have spent my days, under the shade of these cool groves, tending my flowers and laying them before our Mother. Morning after morning I have watched expand, as we dried our hair after bathing and laughed beside the lake. I have watched the light scattering over the mimosa forests, and stood on the stone steps while evening crept over the wooded hills and laid its brown cloak upon the water. Some day, I have thought, I shall come to the lake to bathe for the last time, when I go to die with my lord. I shall say farewell to the spreading sky and the great plain where I have seen my people going about their work. I have thought of our glorious women of old, of those who entered the caverns under Chitor, when all our heroes were ready to rush to death. I cannot tell you how I have felt in the pride of those

solemn memories. I have lifted my hands to this sky, that seemed so loving and so near, and I have vowed—can you not guess what I have vowed? (*She rearranges the flowers before the image, and adds white jasmines to them. Then she looks to the sky.*) It is gathering for storm. Year by year, when this month of the rains came and it seemed as if our Mother were walking the hills, with the clouds like the black vapours of her hair and the lightnings her angry eyes, I have felt no fear. I have bowed myself and called her Mother, and I have prayed that she would let me die as those glorious ones who died long ago in the day of Mewar's ruin and tempest. But I never thought, even in dreams, that to me this unheard-of honour would come, that just by my death my country would be saved. Lakshmi, have you ever seen Chitor?

LAKSHMI (*sobbing*): Never.

KRISHNA: I have seen it; from this roof, in my thoughts. I have seen it as my father has told me of it—lifted high out of the plains, not gently sloping as our hills do here, but jutting upwards like the mount of Indra. It is a wilderness, and holy; no man may build there again. There live the spirits of our hero-ancestors who made it the greatest city in the whole earth. For those who died for Chitor did not go to the City of the Dead, but to the Mansions of the Sun their father; and from those Mansions they pass at will to their holy city of earth and live over again their earth-days. Men who do not know and who go there by daylight say that Chitor is jungle, a fastness of boars and snakes and leopards. But it is lions that live there, the lion-spirits of our ancestors.(33) Our Mother has her temples there; still my father's priests go

there daily to feed her with blood of goats and buffaloes and wild deer.(34) At night the hill is on fire, and no one dare go near it; for the Great Place of Burning is ringed with hoods of cobras, the Snake-King and all his armies dance there. And the Goddess herself dances in the old flames of our mothers' dying; and our mothers who died with their lords are with her, her *yoginis*,(35) dancing madly in the light of the jewels in the cobras' hoods. Kali is our Queen and Mother. All through the centuries our land has worshipped her, and she loves us above all lands. Men call her cruel and pitiless; but they do not know her, nor how deep is her pity and how vast her compassion. I have seen her in my heart, and I know that this dreadful dance of hers is but her playing. Time is her theatre, and in it she sports. She tests us by fire and battle, ever calling us to herself through this delusion. (*After a pause.*) Do you think my father will come soon?

LAKSHMI: Oh, I am sure he will.

KRISHNA: Yes, I am sure he will not let me die without bidding me farewell. My dear father! (*She becomes silent.*) And my mother, too, must soon be here. I have said farewell to everyone else. Lakshmi, this world is glass, and the stone which Death flings shatters it, and our image in it vanishes. Age after age, this has been happening. Mother and father and friends, these are only the roots of illusion, and we make ourselves unhappy because we think them to be real. (*Childishly grave and sweet, she goes up to* LAKSHMI *and puts her arms about her.*) Do not our sacred books tell us that even the sun and moon and the shining stars, the candles of this theatre where our Mother plays, will one day be blown out? There is a

storm coming, when Kali will be our only refuge. I am passing away before that storm. We know all these things, yet we weep when our friends die. In many a heart there is secret wailing, even when a woman has followed her lord gloriously, as our custom is.

LAKSHMI (*breaking down*): There is wailing in many thousand hearts to-day for you, our Flower of Mewar.

KRISHNA (*comforting her*): You are not to weep. Friend, look up; smile in my face. I am dying for Mewar, and there is no wailing in my heart—nothing but a pride so great that I can scarcely believe it is to me, Krishna, that this honour has come. To-day I go to the Mansions of the Sun; there I shall see Padmani, and many a glorious soul besides. And they will not scorn me, though I am but a girl and have come, not having eaten fire,([36]) as they did, but by the poison-cup. Yes; and I have thoughts more great, more wonderful still. Lakshmi, how can you pity me or weep for me, when you see my mind? To-day, about the time when you, my dear companion of childhood, go to your sleep, I shall be with our Mother, the Goddess who loves our land and race. She will tell me that Mewar, the great and wonderful Mewar that the whole earth worships, has been saved. (*Raptly.*) Lakshmi, that will happen to-day. Listen, and I will tell you one thing that lies deeper yet in my secret thoughts. Many and many a time, as I have watched the morning rising over the grey plains, with its rivers of sudden gold flooding the clouds, I have thought that even so, one day, my son, my own son, would rise in my life. To-day I know that no son will ever come to me. But I feel that Mewar has become my son. Had a son come to me, I

might have died when he came. To-day I am to die, and Mewar is to become alive by my death. So Mewar has become like my child to me. I am happier than any mother, in dying to give my land birth. (*She moves to the wall, and stretches her hands out to the plain.*) Mimosa forests which your gold-dusty flowers make bright! Dark green secrecy of tamarinds, light emerald tents of mangoes! I shall not look from this garden on you again. But to-day all this dear land that nourishes you has become the child of me, who am dying childless; and my children's children, looking on you, will remember Krishna, the girl who died for them. Men gave me fame for being beautiful, and I brought a curse upon you. But my beauty and that curse are passing from you to-day. Lakshmi, see how wonderfully the night is spreading over these dear fields! There is an oriole calling from that tallest mango. To-morrow these green parrots will be screaming as they rush through the air, and swing up to our balconies and cornices, to cling there, fluttering, flashing moments—yes, that is what they are; they are like the happy moments of our playing, and they pass. I shall never see you again, birds of Mewar; but you are mine, for to-day I am Mewar, and from to-day I am in Mewar's heart for ever, forgiven for the evil that I have brought upon my land.

[*Enter the* Rani of Mewar.

Mother, you have come to speak to me, your Krishna. Oh, Mother, how I have been longing for you! (*She runs up to her.*)

Rani (*embracing her*): My child, I cannot let you go! (*Weeps.*)

Krishna (*gravely sweet*): Mother, why this weeping for the shortening of life's sorrows? I am not afraid to die. Am I not your child? And child of the Sisodia race?

Rani: There are no Sisodias. Your father has become a shopkeeper, like those accursed English who refused to help us. He has bartered his daughter for the freedom which he should have bought with the sword.

Krishna (*she has disengaged herself from her mother's embrace*): Mother, you do not understand. Instead of many thousands of our brave men dying, just one girl is to die. I am a woman, and we are marked out for sacrifice from our birth. I was not slain in infancy; let me thank my father that he has let me live so long. Should I live on now, there is but one way in which a Rajput lady can die, on her lord's funeral pyre. You yourself, Mother, taught me this when you put the lighted lamp into my hands.([37]) Has any daughter of Sisodia race lived to pass away quietly in a quiet old age?

Rani: If you were dying as other Sisodia daughters have died I should not be weeping. Dry-eyed, I would dress you for your lord's funeral pyre. But you are dying as a child, your playtime scarcely over.

Krishna: Mother, it was for playing only that I came to this earth. I have played with its flowers and children: under the shadow of its boughs I have played, and in the cooler shadow still of my own happy thoughts. Now, since that game is finished, let me go hence playing, a child whose laughter is followed by the instant hush of sleep. This life of ours is only play; and our Guardian-Goddess is the Mistress of our play. One by one, as the

evening falls, she takes us home. (*She assumes an attitude of meditation before the* IMAGE.)

RANI: You offer me the bitter comfort which is all our priests will give us. All is illusion, illusion—still, on every side, more illusion! Is your dying illusion? Or this utter shame of our race only play? You will not fool me into silence. You are not dying for Mewar. You are dying for cowards.

KRISHNA (*rising, and facing her mother with a look that is half-defiant, half-appealing*): Mother, I am dying for Mewar.

RANI (*wildly*): No one can die for Mewar. Mewar is dead, is dead, is dead. (*She is shouting now.*) The Sisodia race has perished, and after to-day can never rise again.

KRISHNA: Have pity on me, Mother. Say farewell to me with smiling face. Let me take my happy leave of you. Bless me, my Mother.

RANI (*weeping*): My child, my darling child, all my blessing fall on your dear head a thousand times! Oh, my child, my child! Let all Mewar go to dust, let all the race of the Sisodias go rather than that you should die! I am going to speak, for my heart is a burning coal. They have made one law for themselves and another for us. They, our lords, choose when and how they shall die. They call us goddesses, they boast, till earth rings with it, of the way they honour us. But no man has ever climbed a woman's funeral pyre, though we perish in scores with one man.

KRISHNA: Mother——

RANI: Yes, I know they are our lords and we must worship them. Oh, my child, do not think my words

wickedness, just because I am crazed with this sorrow! We do worship them; and they were worthy of worship in the days when they knew how to die. Once the Sisodia race could fight to save Padmani's honour. To-day there are no Sisodias. Your father has promised you to one man after another, as each proved stronger. To-day you must die, because he has seen the Mahratta camp-smoke. Where is the Rajput courage of which our minstrels sing? They are not slaying in their valour the thing that they love, to save it from stain and dishonour. In their terror they are killing to save themselves, and they hope that no one will notice it.

KRISHNA: Mother, do you know what you have done? You have made me afraid of the darkness and terrified of Death whom I had conquered. Oh, I knew there were fears in my mind; but those ghosts I never saw, for I would not let them come into the light. I had a fierce joy that drove them back into my heart's recesses. That was when I knew I was dying for my country's honour. But now my mind is filled with fears and misery and with utter despair. Mother, say you have been speaking only to test me, and that it is not true! Give me back my peace again! My mind was a temple filled with hymns and incense. The Goddess herself seemed to be dwelling in it. But you have made it a desolation. (*Weeps.*) No, I will not give way. I am a woman, so born to die; a princess of Mewar, so one who laughs at death and suffering. Death has been our nurse through the ages, and it is a small matter that I am going to its embrace. I will put away these thoughts of what others should have done. (*Half to herself.*) Surely it is a great thing if Mewar

can win rest by the dying of a simple girl! (*She looks up proudly.*) I am troubled no longer. I have remembered what you, Mother, made me forget.

[*The splash of oars is heard; then a boat is tied up and a torch lights up the dusk of the central archway leading to the water.* JAUWAN DAS *enters. The boatmen's torches can be seen glimmering outside.*

JAUWAN DAS: Krishna, I come from your father. He bids you drink this cup, by which our land will bless your name for ever. He bids me bring you deeper love than can be spoken, and because of the greatness of that love he dare not see your face again. He bids me further: Say to my child, Forgive me, and remember not this my last gift, when there is no other gift left in my power. Think of me as your father who loves you; your father, more wretched than any father since the world began. (*He proffers the poison, which* KRISHNA *accepts.*)

KRISHNA: Say to my noble father that I, his daughter Krishna, thank him for life and for fifteen years of happiness. Through all these years he has sheltered me, and his love makes my path smooth to-day. Tell him you saw me smiling. I pray for his long life and prosperity, and that by my death his sorrows may be removed.

RANI (*rushing forward*): Give me the cup! I will go to your father, and will beg him till he saves you.

JAUWAN DAS: Lady, the Rana's command is that all withdraw, that the Lady Krishna may pass hence alone.

KRISHNA: Yes, Mother; and you know there must be no inauspicious sound of sorrow about my going. Bid me farewell; see in my face how happy I am in such a love

as yours. Do not think of me as dead, but as gone to the heart of the Mother of our land. Into the hands of that Guardian-Goddess, the Mother of us all, I your child Krishna am now passing. (*Appealingly.*) Say farewell, Mother, and smile upon me, as you have always done!

RANI: Farewell. (*She embraces* KRISHNA.) Daughter, I will not fall below your greatness. See, I am smiling. But oh, my child, my child! (*She bursts into uncontrollable weeping.*)

KRISHNA: You also, uncle, you who have always loved me and have brought me now this message of my father's love.

JAUWAN DAS (*embracing her*): Krishna, you are not a girl but a goddess. Our whole land is weeping to-day. (*To the* RANI OF MEWAR.) Lady, let me lead you.

[*They go out.*

KRISHNA (*turning to* LAKSHMI): You last, dear friend of childhood. See, it is evening here, and time for sleep. Remember our days and nights together and our hours of joyous play. This last game you must leave me to finish alone. Weeping, Lakshmi? But, if you saw all that I see, you would not weep for your Krishna. Come, bid me farewell! (*She lifts* LAKSHMI'S *face, then holds it away from her, and laughs.*) With smiling face, Lakshmi!

[LAKSHMI *breaks down as they embrace, and goes out sobbing.* KRISHNA *is left alone.*)

KRISHNA (*plucking hibiscus flowers*): Let me pay my last worship to you, Mother; these blood-red flowers that you love. (*She lays them before the* IMAGE, *and sits in silence for a few moments. Then she drains the poison-cup.*

As she sits on still in meditation, gazing at the IMAGE, *her eyes dim with tears and to her vision it seems to grow larger —a Form whose face is benign and full of pity.* KRISHNA *stretches her hands to the* VISION *and calls out to it.*) All my heart, Mother, is crying. Mother! Quiet the wailing of this child within me!

CURTAIN.

ACT IV

ACT IV

Scene as in Act II. It is night of the third day, the one after the PRINCESS KRISHNA'S *death. The room is lit by a single large lamp.*

The Rains have broken, and the sky is massed with black clouds. It is not raining now; but lightning is playing on the hills in the distance, and low thunderings can be heard from time to time.

BHIM SINGH *and* AJIT SINGH *are together.*

AJIT SINGH: Sir, why this unresting self-reproach? You have saved Mewar. Men will never cease to praise you.

BHIM SINGH: Do I care for men's praise after this? I have flung away my peace for ever.

AJIT SINGH: You have pierced yourself with a spear to save us. Before you were our Rana; now there is not one of us who does not regard you as a god.

BHIM SINGH: It is only you who says these things. Others by their looks tell me plainly what they think.

[*Enter* SARUP SINGH.

SARUP SINGH: I renounce you! Dust on my allegiance if it is to be preserved by homage to a coward and murderer! Accursed be the tongue that commanded death for that child! (*To* AJIT SINGH.) For you, who have brought such shame on our honoured lineage, no punishment could be sufficient. You have wrought a blot so foul that no Sisodia will ever lift his head again. (*To* BHIM SINGH *again.*) The line of Bappa nears its end. We began with a God,(38) and we finish with a poltroon. Heaven has sent this piteous deed as a signal of our destruction. Krishna's lovely life was the lightning-flash before the thunderstone

falls. Stain on the Sisodia race, impure of Rajput blood, may your head be covered with dust, as your deed has covered us with unutterable shame! Die childless, and your name with you!

BHIM SINGH: You can utter no curse too heavy. I hear you like my own mind outside myself.

SARUP SINGH (*in an ecstasy of fury*): If words could blast you, I could speak for ever! There must be worse than words waiting for you. Search your skies for storm! It cannot be that the gods will remain silent!

AJIT SINGH: An evil fate wrote this in the doom of the Sisodias.

SARUP SINGH: There is no evil fate, except the evil fate of being Sisodias. This is the end of our centuries of boasting and barbaric pride! The gods have written our sin in the suffering of a child, that we might bow our heads in the dust for ever. (*To* BHIM SINGH.) Ah, traitor to our line, had the whole world any maiden like our Flower of Rajasthan? If, coward as you are, you had not scorned owing safety to deception, could you not have let her lie hid, while you sent some meaner victim to death? Another day, and Sangram Singh would have been here with your followers. They were not three leagues away at sunset, when I left them and came to gather your guards and make our defences sure. He will be here before midnight to curse the coward he is hurrying to save.

BHIM SINGH: Sarup Singh, you yourself have said that I have no followers. What force is Sangram Singh bringing?

Ajit Singh: I can tell you. He has had time to raise his own tenants, perhaps a dozen score in all, and Sarup Singh's are with him, another twenty score. There are a hundred thousand foreign troopers in the field against us.

Sarup Singh: Even so, had the enemy stormed Udaipur? Or even attacked it? Were Mussulmans forcing our homes? Had all these things happened, still could we not have died as Rajputs?

Bhim Singh: You have always poured scorn on this dying as Rajputs. Was it not better that one girl should die, and Mewar be saved?

Sarup Singh: I own that I have spoken scorn of our Rajput dyings, for they were no proof of valour but only of despair and stupidity. But, though they were no proof of valour, there was valour in them; yes, and there was honour when our men and women died together, by flame and sword. It is not for nothing that all India worships the Sisodia name. It may have been folly—blood-soaked and horrible—to send our women to the pyre and our men to slaughter, while the walls that could have defended them were still standing. But it was not folly to mount the pyre serene and calm, or to meet death without a sinew trembling. There, at any rate, is something the world can learn from us, however much it may scorn to die in our fashion. But in all our annals there is no such tale as this of you and your child. (*He paces up and down.*) Rana Bhim Singh, even now my mind has a doubt. For the sake of my old allegiance, for the sake of our old friendship, tell me, was it some madness that blinded you? Or have I erred in honouring you, and are you but a coward at heart?

AJIT SINGH: You can answer your own question. You have seen our noble Rana in battle.

SARUP SINGH: Battle! battle! Nothing but battle! That is the only valour we know! And even that has gone from us, when we poison our Princess—poison her because our Rana dare not fight.

BHIM SINGH: She died to save herself from dishonour.

SARUP SINGH: What dishonour! Would Sindhia—or Man Singh—or even Amir Khan—have dared to wrong the daughter of the Sisodia chieftain? Devils though they are, they would have shrunk from an act that would have made every inch of Rajput ground yield swords for a crop. Why, half Sindhia's force are traitor Rajputs—have we not their leader here? (*Scornfully, as* AJIT SINGH *makes a movement of protest.*) Oh, you claim that you serve Man Singh! Man Singh, who is Sindhia's slave! They would not have followed their leader in this!

BHIM SINGH: Do you think I did not love my child?

[*Unannounced,* SINDHIA'S MESSENGER *enters. He is carrying a basket.*

MESSENGER (*making no sign of obeisance*): I come from the Maharajadhiraja Daulat Rao Sindhia.

BHIM SINGH (*who is noticing nothing*): Return to thy master. Tell him that I am accursed for ever; that I have dragged my father's name in the dust and spilt the noblest life that ever sprang from Rajput blood.

MESSENGER: All this he has heard; and he sends me with three messages. First, your peace is bought, and to-day he withdraws his armies awhile. The tiger preys on deer and not on hares. You may walk outside Udaipur

again, and call yourself Rana. The second message is a question. He asks: Is this the boasted Rajput valour? Say to Rana Bhim Singh: You have scorned my blood and lineage, and your pride has affronted Heaven. To-day the whole earth knows that all your Sisodia courage was in the frail body of a girl, and that girl is dead. God send you joy of your freedom!

SARUP SINGH (*stepping quickly forward*): And is your third message like these two?

MESSENGER (*cowed*): I have forgotten it. No, there was no third message. (*Turns to go.*)

SARUP SINGH (*taking his stand between him and the door*): Are you now returning to your master?

MESSENGER: I am, sir.

SARUP SINGH: Not before you have done obeisance to the Chief of the Sisodias! On your knees!

[MESSENGER *hesitates.*

Your master is Sindhia, that cipher whom his armies make into many thousands. You may carry your complaint to him presently. I am SARUP SINGH, who have no followers, and I tell you to kneel.

[MESSENGER *grovels in terror, then rises and attempts to escape.* SARUP SINGH *detains him.*

You have still this basket—a gift, no doubt, from Sindhia to the Chief of Rajasthan. Your third message! Deliver it.

MESSENGER: My lord, it is nothing—vegetables I am taking home.

SARUP SINGH: Then looted from some Rajput's field. You shall leave them here.

MESSENGER: Let the Presence show mercy! I am but the servant of Sindhia, and must do what he commands. Perforce I brought this basket, but I never meant to deliver it.

SARUP SINGH: You would have been wiser, in that case, not to have brought it in here. Now open it.

BHIM SINGH (*like a man awakening from a dream*): Open; have no fear. Sarup Singh, hear him patiently, whatever his message.

MESSENGER (*uncovering the steel headpiece of* SANGRAM SINGH): The Maharaja Sindhia sends you this.

BHIM SINGH (*gazing at it*): The towers of Mewar fall. This man kept the kingdom when my father was a child.

SARUP SINGH: The ancient Rajput valour lies dead. Now am I sure that all is finished. Tell us by what plot of secret assassination your master slew this prince of heroes? How came it that the dagger beat down the spear. (*Threateningly.*) Speak swiftly; and in the presence of the Chief of the Sisodias remember that thou art a slave.

MESSENGER: The Maharaja heard of Rajputs moving to save you. He caught them as darkness was falling. They are dead.

BHIM SINGH (*mildly*): Go in peace.

[*Exit* MESSENGER.

SARUP SINGH (*examining the headpiece*): A bullet-notch against the temple. I told you often, brave head, that our Rajput valour was no match for this world that shoots with guns and cannon. Unhappy and perplexed,

you held your way in this age as one who floats on a raft which strong tides swing, now this way, now that. But you have taken your eyes of courage undimmed through the gates of death; and you were at peace, with no knowledge of that child's murder to trouble you. (*Half to himself.*) Many of my friends are dead in this slaughter. Sangram's followers were his and mine. Krishna's spirit will be glad to-night, knowing there are Rajputs still. I would I were with them.

[*Wailing without. A* SERVANT *enters.*

SERVANT: Sir, prepare yourself for heavy news. God does what He wills, and we must bow. The Rani our Mother is no more. Since the Lady Krishna's going she has taken no food, and has lain in her inner rooms alone. Now she is dead; but whether by her own hand or from her fierce sorrow we do not know.

BHIM SINGH: Let her pyre be made ready. Sarup Singh, your thunder falls.

SARUP SINGH: Rana Bhim Singh, if I could heal your suffering by my own I should praise God. My bitter hatred is past, and I see only that you are broken. Eight-and-twenty years have I served you,(39) Chief of the Sisodias. Remember our long friendship!

BHIM SINGH (*dully*): I remember nothing but the lately dead.

SARUP SINGH: Cast your mind back, and remember that day of peril at Akola, when we vowed to fight side by side to the end. If I am leaving you now, it is because the end has come. When I came to-day I thought I was going because the old bond had snapped for ever. But

now I know that it is still strong, and that I am going only because my life is finished.

BHIM SINGH: Will you leave me in this hour of my shame?

SARUP SINGH: I blamed you in cruel words, for I forgot what you had suffered. I believe now that you had but one wish, which was to save Mewar, though it wrung your soul. I know that there was no fear in your mind. You went astray, Rana Bhim Singh. But it was the cowardice of others, and not your own, that led you. It is not at your spirit that the Dead will point hereafter, calling you child-murderer. (*He gazes at* AJIT SINGH, *who shrinks before his look.* AJIT SINGH *stands aside, and passes slowly out of the scene in the conversation which follows.*) And I believe that Krishna's dying has saved Mewar.

BHIM SINGH (*despairingly*): Yes, if Sindhia's going is the salvation of Mewar.

SARUP SINGH: It has saved much more than Mewar, and from much more than Sindhia. (*He laughs.*) I am going to Sindhia's camp, though I do not think I shall reach his tent. But first I shall go to the English. If they have a quarrel brewing with Sindhia I can tell them things that will help them. Even though I shall not see his punishment, it will be my hand that strikes him after I am dead. I have been thinking of our women, and I have seen how they have suffered. It is not my child alone, or yours; though, as long as it was the children of other men, we were willing to let the priests tell us it was religion and the minstrels that it was glory. But they have died by thousands, patiently and silently; and they

have lived in darkness and servitude. To-day, because of them, I cannot believe that this Rajput race is to perish. In some way that I cannot understand, I believe that my child's death in the fire and your child's death by the poison-cup are going to save the Mewar that they worshipped. Our race has been hard and stupid and cruel. But now I feel that Krishna's dying has opened eyes everywhere. You can feel this wherever you go. I saw different faces in the streets as I came to you. Even our women are thinking what they have never dared to think before. Even Sindhia is thinking. There are many things that we have done countless times, age after age, which Krishna's dying has killed. No, not quite killed yet. We shall do them again. But every time it will be harder to do them. Every time a child goes, with solemn, frightened eyes, into the funeral-fire the watchers will remember your child draining her poison-cup; and the women and priests will have to shout louder than their madness has ever done yet, if they are to drown what the mind will be saying. I am sure that Mewar is saved. There will be less drum-beating, there will be fewer processions; but there will be a safer happiness in our homes. Rana Bhim Singh, for any bitterness that has come between us let us exchange forgiveness as I leave you!

Bhim Singh: You have uttered no reproaches that I have not known to be below my deserts.

Sarup Singh: Forget them. We have been fools—blind and mad and wicked. But we could not altogether help what we did. This harvest was not sown by us, we were but the reapers. It has been growing up for century after century. And now it is all over. It is all over. Rana

Bhim Singh, Chieftain of the Sisodias, Lion of Mewar,
I flung my allegiance from me. Let me take it back.
Yes, on my knees, and with your hand on my sword-hilt.
(*He kneels, and* RANA BHIM SINGH *moves towards him.*)

CURTAIN.

NOTES

NOTES

I have followed, in the main, the story told in Tod's *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*. But, though he was an eager observer and enjoyed remarkable opportunities of knowing the facts, Tod was careless and uncritical, and his narrative of the events which led up to the Princess Krishna's death is confused and contradictory. I have therefore felt the more entitled to handle his details freely. For dramatic purposes I have taken two liberties with larger facts. The Eklinga interview took place in June, 1806, and Krishna's death seven months later, in 1807; these two events I have brought together. Then I have dropped into the background two characters prominent throughout the action of these seven months, Jagat Singh of Jodhpur and the freebooter AmirKhan. Both of them, even in their own dissolute times, were men of such unredeemed villainy that they pass the bounds of credibility and become grotesque. The practical omission of Amir Khan from the drama's purview has made Sindhia's conduct more directly responsible for the tragedy than was the case, since it was Amir Khan who first made the suggestion that Krishna should die.

[1] Warren Hastings and Wellesley.

[2] Sir George Barlow, Governor-General 1805–7. The *Oxford History of India* says he "has been justly described as 'the meanest of the Governors-General.'" . . . He "went so far as to bind the Government of British India not to make any engagement with the Rajput states for their protection—a document described by Lord Hastings as 'the inexplicable treaty,' which tied the hands of Lord Minto throughout his term of office and hampered Lord Hastings until 1816."

[3] The Mewar race, who claimed descent from the Sun-God.

[4] A hundred thousand. The sum would be equivalent to about £10,000.

[5] Ambaji in eight years extracted £2,000,000 from Mewar; he took one-half of all agricultural produce.

[6] A Pathan adventurer who lived "at free quarters" (Lyall) in Rajputana for nearly twenty years, with an army of 30,000 horse and foot; as unprincipled and merciless a bandit as even India has ever known.

[7] Sindhia's great rival.

[8] Many of Mewar's troubles were due to the rivalry, often expressed in civil war, of the Saktawat and Chandawat clans.

[9] After the war of 1803 Sindhia was required to disband all his foreign officers.

[10] Military chiefs.

[11] To Lord Lake, before his final defeat of Holkar.

[12] Betel; formally presented to guests at going.

[13] Where the offices of the East India Company were.

[14] Uncle and predecessor of the Sindhia of this play.

[15] Tod writes thus of Mewar in 1817, when the British took it under their protection and he became the Resident: "Expression might be racked for phrases which could adequately delineate the miseries all classes had endured. . . . The capital will serve as a specimen of the country. Oodipoor, which formerly reckoned 50,000 houses within the walls, had not now 3000 occupied, the rest were in ruin, the rafters being taken for firewood."

[16] The terrible Kāli. One of the Mewar legends tells how she appeared to the Rana, before Allah-ud-din's sack of the capital in 1303, saying "I am hungry," and demanded that twelve kings must die. She was satisfied by the Rana's eleven younger sons and the Rana himself dying in battle successively, after reigns of two or three days; and a remnant escaped from the sack of Chitor.

[17] The merciless freebooters who arose in "the awful anarchy in Rajputana and Central India resulting from the refusal of the British Government to assert itself as the paramount power" (*Oxford History of India*).

[18] The capital of Mewar till its last destruction in 1568, when Udaipur took its place.

[19] Mewar, alone of the great Rajput families, never gave a bride to the Moguls.

[20] Outcastes; here, Mussulmans.

[21] Battles of Assaye and Argaum in the south, Delhi and Laswari in the north.

[22] Sir George Barlow "broke faith so openly with Jaipur that the Directors felt constrained to regard his action as 'extremely questionable'" (*Oxford History of India*). Also, "even the Raja of Bundi, who had helped Colonel Monson in his extremity, was abandoned to the cruelty of the Maratha hordes. It is a sad and shameful story, still worse when read in detail than when presented in abstract." (*Ibid.*)

[23] A female demon called the Dhakun is supposed to haunt the *Mahasatis* or places of immolation.

[24] "The *shahaba* or wandering meteoric fires, on fields of battle and in the places of 'great sacrifice' . . . are the source of superstitious dread . . . having their origin in the same natural cause as the 'wandering fires of Odin'; the phosphorescent salts produced from animal decomposition." (Tod.)

Tod's picturesque note on Gwalior may be quoted also:

"On the east side of that famed fortress, where myriads of warriors have fattened the soil, these phosphorescent lights often present a singular appearance. I have, with friends whose eyes this will meet, marked the procession of these lambent night-fires, becoming extinguished at one point and rising at another, which, aided by the unequal *locale*, have been frequently mistaken for the Mahratta prince returning with his numerous torch-bearers from a distant day's sport. I have dared as bold a Rajpoot as ever lived to approach them; whose sense of the levity of my desire was strongly depicted, both in speech and mien: 'men he would encounter, but not the spirits of those ever slain in battle.' It was generally about the

conclusion of the rains that these lights were observed, whe evaporation took place from these marshy grounds impregnate with salts."

[25] The resource of Rajputs in desperation—the women t the flames, the men to their enemies' swords.

[26] The traditional founder of the House of Mewar.

[27] At one time there were three hundred Europeans in on of Sindhia's brigades, mostly French adventurers, but includin even respectable English and Scots gentlemen, as well as runawa bluejackets and soldiers.

[28] Sindhia's grandfather was the Peshwa's slipper-bearer.

[29] The famous queen whose beauty is said to have cause Allah-ud-din to attack and ultimately sack Chitor in 1303.

[30] Female infanticide was very common among the Rajputs

[31] The founder of the Mogul Empire in India.

[32] These are offered to Kali, because they are the colour o blood.

[33] *Singh* means *lion.*

[34] Kali's shrines on the deserted plateau of Chitor are stil fed with blood.

[35] Female ascetics; here, attendants of Kali.

[36] The colloquial expression for a woman who has been burnt with her husband's corpse is "one who has eaten fire" *sati—faithful wife*—is a book-word.

[37] It was the custom to place a knife in a boy's hand and a lighted lamp in a girl's to signify that they were to die by battle and funeral-flame.

[38] Bappa was deified.

[39] Rana Bhim Singh came to the throne when eight years old.

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